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Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains

FREDERICK C. LUEBKE

The importance of foreign-born immigrants and their children for the settlement of the Great Plains has been largely overlooked by historians of the frontier and of the trans-Mississippi West. While an extensive literature exists treating Indian history and Indian-white relationships, white populations have usually been treated as homogeneous. In such a classic study as Walter Prescott Webb's *The Great Plains*, ethnic groups of European origin are scarcely mentioned. More recent interpretations of the region note differences between Indians, Chicanos, Orientals, and blacks, but fail to distinguish European ethnic groups, such as Norwegians, Germans, and Czechs from each other or from the native-born populations.¹

Analysis of census data for the nineteenth century, however, reveals that the foreign-born and their children often constituted a majority of the frontier population of the Great Plains states. In 1870, when the fringe of settlement moved onto the eastern reaches of the Great Plains, 25 percent of the 123,000 persons in the newly created state of Nebraska were foreign-born. Together with the second generation, they accounted for 54 percent of all inhabitants, excluding Indians. Even as late as 1900, immigrants and natives of foreign parentage formed 47 percent of the state's

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¹ Walter P. Webb, *The Great Plains* (New York, 1931). As a recent example, see Arrell M. Gibson, *The West in the Life of the Nation* (Lexington, Massachusetts, 1976).

population, while in North Dakota the proportion reached 78 percent, the highest figure registered for any state in the union.²

The percentages of foreign-born persons were greater in states north of Nebraska and lower in those to the south. In 1870, Kansas registered 13 percent, about half the Nebraska proportion, while Oklahoma remained closed to white settlement and the Texas portion of the Great Plains remained mostly unoccupied. In Dakota Territory, however, the percentage of foreign-born persons in 1870 was startlingly high at 34 percent, while in the plains and mountain territories of Wyoming and Montana it spiraled to 39 percent.³

When data from the county level are examined, the importance of white ethnic groups for the settlement of the Great Plains becomes even more obvious. The foreign-born were often more numerous proportionately on the fringe of settlement than they were in the older or eastern parts of the Great Plains states. To illustrate with the example of Nebraska, the proportion of foreign-born persons in nearly all counties located on or near the Great Plains proper in 1870 exceeded the percentages recorded for the state as a whole. Figures of 50 percent and above were common, and the highest proportions were, as a rule, recorded in the westernmost counties. After 1870, however, when the frontier of settlement edged onto the High Plains, the concentration of the foreign-born was not sustained to the same extent, though significant ethnic settlements were not uncommon.

In order to understand the role of white ethnic groups in the history of the Great Plains, one must first relate it to the larger general patterns of emigration to America. During the first fifty years following the American Revolution, until approximately 1825, few Europeans emigrated to the United States. During those years the frontier of settlement moved steadily westward across the Appalachian Mountains into the vast interior. By 1820, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois had achieved statehood. Because there were few immigrants in the country, the process

² Unless otherwise noted, the quantitative data presented in this paper are taken from the several volumes on population produced by the U.S. Bureau of the Census from the Eighth Census (1860) through the Thirteenth Census (1910). See also *Statistical Review of Immigration 1820-1910—Distribution of Immigrants 1850-1900*, vol. 3 of *Reports of the [Dillingham] Immigration Commission* (Washington, 1911).

³ Cf. J. Neale Carman, *Foreign-Language Units of Kansas*, vol. 1, *Historical Atlas and Statistics* (Lawrence, 1962), 33-37.

of settlement was achieved by Anglo-Americans. This fact is the basis for the myth that immigrants were unable to cope with the frontier environment.⁴ By the 1840s, however, immense numbers of Irish, Germans, and English entered the country and many went to the frontier territories of that time—Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Texas. Following a dip in immigration during the Civil War, a new and greater flood of humanity inundated the United States, climaxing in the 1880s, the precise years when the Great Plains states were being settled. The vast majority of these people came from Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Great Britain, Ireland, and, to a lesser extent, from Bohemia and Russia. Following a reduction during the 1890s, the flow of immigration into the United States increased steadily and reached its largest annual total in 1907. By this time, however, when the major sources of emigrants to the United States had shifted to southern and eastern European countries, the Great Plains region had been settled. Although some twentieth-century immigrants found homes in eastern Montana, western parts of the Dakotas, and in other areas where some land was still available for homesteading, relatively few of them came to the Great Plains.

Most immigrants who were attracted to the region were farmers or persons who hoped to succeed by taking up some form of agriculture. Although they could be found in the towns and villages of the plains, they were proportionately more numerous in the rural areas. A large though undetermined proportion of the immigrants lived in eastern states before migrating to the plains. They frequently had pursued urban-type occupations there in order to accumulate sufficient capital to start a new life on a western farm.

Most European immigrants came to the Great Plains in family units, with relatives and neighbors following later. Formal colonization was important for some ethnic groups, and in some cases large numbers of persons came as the result of highly organized programs. Some European groups would have preferred to recreate the peasant village setting they were accustomed to, but ordinarily this was not possible because of government land policies. Moreover, government grants of land to the railroads were made in checkerboard patterns, a practice that effectively

⁴ John A. Hawgood, *The Tragedy of German-America* (New York, [1940] 1970), 22–23, provides the classic statement of this idea.

prevented immigrants from massing large tracts in the solid or contiguous blocks necessary for the European pattern.⁵

The most important single cause that impelled people to leave Europe was economic. For example, poverty and famine in Ireland were overpowering in the 1840s and 1850s. The inability of preindustrial Germany, especially its southwestern provinces, to support its exploding population in the nineteenth century is unquestioned; and in England the enclosure movement sent vast numbers of unemployed persons to the cities and from thence to America. But each country had its own array of expelling forces that were also political, religious, social, and psychological. To illustrate, the revolutions of 1848 sent many thousands of political refugees to the United States; later, in the 1880s, countless young German men fled to escape service in Bismarck's army; many thousands of Russian Jews were driven out by pogroms after 1881; Swedes were especially resentful of the social and political privileges of the upper classes. Whole communities were sometimes flushed with "America fever" as the departure of one person or family stimulated the imaginations of friends and relatives, all eager to escape poverty and oppression. Visions were further enlarged as "America letters" were received from those who had gone before. Each country presents a different pattern of causes that changed with the passage of time. In any case, decisions to emigrate were made individually, and each person's motives were complex, not readily unraveled or subject to easy classification.⁶

Scholars have produced an extensive and sophisticated literature during recent decades that connects emigration from Europe to fluctuations in the economic cycles of Europe and the United States. Earlier studies concluded that the volume of emigration was governed primarily by economic conditions within the United States, but subsequent analyses, more subtle and comprehensive, demonstrated that the flow of emigration was related to European capital investment in the United States. When, for example, British investments were halted in the 1870s because of a

⁵ For a model survey of immigrant groups in one state see Douglas Hale, "European Immigrants in Oklahoma: A Survey," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, 53 (Summer 1975), 179-203.

⁶ The best recent summary of causes of European emigration is in Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet* (New York, 1971), chapters 1-5.

glut of capital in America, a panic and economic depression followed with immigration decreasing accordingly.⁷

Even though European immigration dropped sharply after the devastating Panic of 1873 (the total in 1878 was only one-fourth that of 1873), settlers continued to move onto the Great Plains at approximately the same rate as before. Moreover, immigrants continued to be numerically important, attracted as they were by the land made available by the Homestead Act of 1862, by the advertisements of railroad companies, the efforts of colonization societies, and the blandishments of state boards of immigration.

The Homestead Act opened millions of acres for settlement. In order to obtain a farm of 160 acres virtually without cost, an applicant was required to reside upon his claim for not less than five years and to improve it through cultivation. To qualify for a claim, a homesteader had to be a citizen or to have taken out his first papers for naturalization. During the 1870s and 1880s many thousands of immigrants acquired farms by this means from the Oklahoma border north through Kansas and Nebraska to the Dakota and Montana territories.

The attraction of land ownership was overpowering for many Europeans. News of the Homestead Act spurred uncountable numbers of immigrants to the Great Plains. Land ownership had great symbolic value for the typical newcomer. In Europe, where society was more highly structured, respect and honor were paid to landowners—the larger the tract, the greater the prestige. To the typical European peasant, caught in a land squeeze, 160 acres seemed an immense tract. Moreover, the security afforded by land ownership compensated for the intense feelings of confusion, anxiety, and rootlessness that afflicted many immigrants as they adjusted to life in a strange and alien environment. By contrast, the typical native-born American tended to view land ownership as a means to wealth rather than as an end in itself. When increased population in a given area forced up the value of land, the American farmer frequently sold out for a profit and started out again farther west. Not encumbered with a sentimental attachment to the soil, the old-stock American might exploit it, abuse it, and leave it without regret.

⁷ The most important single volume to probe economic factors is Brinley Thomas, *Migration and Economic Growth: A Study in Great Britain and the Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954). For a convenient summary of this literature see Kristian Hvidt, *Flight to America: The Social Background of 300,000 Danish Emigrants* (New York, 1975), 29–36.

Much of the best land on the Great Plains was not available for homesteading. The federal government had granted it to great railroad companies in order to subsidize the construction of lines into uninhabited territories. Holding alternate square miles of land ten miles on both sides of their rights-of-way, the Union Pacific, the Santa Fe, the Burlington, and the Northern Pacific railroads, among others, conducted systematic efforts to attract buyers to the veritable Eden they often claimed the Great Plains to be. European immigrants bought much of this railroad land, often in response to circulars distributed throughout England, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries by agents dispatched to Europe by the companies. Sometimes these agents organized whole colonies of emigrants, varying in size from ten to a hundred families, on vast tracts of railroad land sold at bargain rates. The railroad companies knew that if a colony were successful its population would subsequently be swelled by friends and relatives who would come later of their own accord. The railroad would prosper correspondingly.⁸

Not all colonization efforts were connected with railroads. Some were organized by ethnoreligious societies, such as the Irish Catholic Colonization Society, the Swedish Agricultural Company, the Hebrew Union Agricultural Society, and the Welsh Land and Emigrant Society of America. Most of these societies were eager to get their countrymen out of the congested cities of the eastern United States to the rich lands of the West where, they believed, the immigrant would have a better chance to prosper and to retain his religion, language, and culture. Such societies often worked closely with the railroads, steamship companies, and state boards of immigration.⁹

⁸ Richard C. Overton, *Burlington West: A Colonization History of the Burlington Railroad* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1941); James B. Hedges, "The Colonization Work of the Northern Pacific Railroad," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 13 (December 1926), 311-42; John D. Unruh, Jr., "The Burlington and Missouri River Railroad Brings the Mennonites to Nebraska, 1873-1878," *Nebraska History*, 45 (March and June 1964), 3-30, 177-206; Morris N. Spencer, "The Union Pacific's Utilization of Its Land Grant with Emphasis on Its Colonization Program" (Ph.D. diss., University of Nebraska, 1950); Barry Combs, "The Union Pacific Railroad and the Early Settlement of Nebraska, 1868-1880," *Nebraska History*, 50 (Spring 1969), 1-26.

⁹ James P. Shannon, *Catholic Colonization on the Western Frontier* (New Haven, 1957); M. Evangela Henthorne, *The Irish Catholic Colonization Association of the United States* (Champaign, 1932); Henry W. Casper, *History of the Catholic Church in Nebraska*, vol. 3, *Catholic Chapters in Nebraska Immigration, 1870-1900* (3 v., Milwaukee, 1960-66), 35-54; Ruth Billdt, *Pioneer Swedish-American Culture in Central Kansas* (Lindsborg, Kansas, 1965).

During the 1860s and early 1870s most of the state and territorial governments of the Great Plains region established boards of immigration designed to stimulate settlement in their respective lands. While the quality and extent of these bureaucratic efforts varied greatly from state to state, most were curtailed or ended by the depression and grasshopper plagues of the 1870s, when few legislators were willing to fund such ventures. They left immigration work in private hands. In Dakota Territory, however, an immigration commission was revived in 1885.¹⁰

Among the private agencies it is difficult to overestimate the importance of the churches in the settlement of the Great Plains. Lutherans, Catholics, Mennonites, Evangelicals—all depended for support upon the gathering of immigrants in a given area and hence had an institutional interest in maintaining a steady flow of new arrivals. The efforts of clergymen to induce immigration were ordinarily unsystematic and informal, but nonetheless effective. Migrants would be exhorted to settle in a place where a congregation of their own faith had already been established. The immigrants in turn relied heavily on the church to provide social intercourse with others who shared their language, customs, and beliefs. Of all immigrant institutions, the church was the easiest to establish, the most effective in its mission, and hence the most long-lived. Unlike most ethnic institutions, the church survived the transition to an English-speaking society.¹¹

By far the most numerous immigrant people to settle in the Great Plains states were the Germans. They were most heavily concentrated in Nebraska, where in 1900, persons of German stock (first and second

¹⁰ Helen M. Anderson, "The Influence of Railway Advertising upon the Settlement of Nebraska" (M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska, 1926), 47–50; Herbert Schell, "Official Immigration Activities of Dakota Territory," *North Dakota Historical Quarterly*, 7 (October 1932), 5–24; Ralph E. Blodgett, "The Colorado Territorial Board of Immigration," *Colorado Magazine*, 46 (Summer 1969), 245–56. For a later period, see Warren A. Henke, "Imagery, Immigration and the Myth of North Dakota, 1890–1933," *North Dakota History*, 38 (Fall 1971), 412–91.

¹¹ Denominational histories constitute a rich source for the history of ethnic groups. One of the most comprehensive is the three-volume work by Henry W. Casper, n. 9, above. For other examples, see Paul C. Nyholm, *The Americanization of the Danish Lutheran Church in America* (Minneapolis, 1963); George M. Stephenson, *Religious Aspects of Swedish Immigration* (Minneapolis, 1932); George Eisenach, *A History of the German Congregational Churches in the United States* (Yankton, S.D., 1938); C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites* (4th ed., rev., Newton, Kansas, 1957). In addition there are many graduate theses and dissertations treating immigrant church history on state and local levels.

generation, or the immigrants and their children) accounted for 18 percent of the total population. In Kansas, they constituted a significantly smaller proportion of the population (9 percent). Much less numerous in the sparsely populated Dakotas, they nevertheless formed 14 percent in South Dakota and 10 percent in North Dakota. Even in Oklahoma, which was not opened to settlement until the 1890s, the Germans were by far the most numerous single ethnic group.¹²

Although they formed heavy concentrations in certain specific areas, the Germans were widely distributed, and at least a few could be found in nearly every county on the plains. The proportion of farmers among them was very high, and consequently they were more numerous in the humid, eastern counties of Nebraska, Kansas, and the Dakotas than in counties solidly within the Great Plains region. Similarly, they tended to be more numerous in the countryside than in the towns. Occupationally, the town Germans were especially successful as merchants and craftsmen, serving their countrymen from the surrounding farms.

The Germans were unusually heterogeneous. Germany itself emerged as a unified country only in 1871; hence, provincial identities were unusually strong among the Germans. These were bolstered by strong religious feeling. Lutheran Germans and Catholic Germans would have remarkably little to do with each other, and neither group felt a bond of affection for more secular-minded, unchurched, or freethinking fellow Germans.¹³

German emigration in the post-Civil War period was especially strong in northern and northeastern areas of Germany, where Protestantism dominated. Consequently, a smaller proportion of Catholic Germans settled in the Great Plains states than had earlier emigrated to Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio. In the eastern states the Germans were sufficiently numerous to erect a complex of ethnic institutions that functioned to ease their adjustment to American life and

¹² Considering their numbers, the Germans of the Great Plains states have received little scholarly attention. My *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln, 1969) contains chapters on patterns of German settlement and assimilation. See also Hildegard Binder Johnson, "The Location of German Immigrants in the Middle West," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 41 (March 1951), 1-41. J. C. Ruppenthal, "The German Element in Central Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 13 (1913-14), 513-33, and Harley J. Stuckey, "The German Element in Kansas," in John Bright, ed., *Kansas: The First Century* (New York, 1956), 329-54, both emphasize Germans from Russia.

¹³ See my *Bonds of Loyalty: German Americans and World War I* (DeKalb, Illinois, 1974), chapter 2.

to perpetuate immigrant culture. On the Great Plains, churches were the most common German institutions; however, in some towns, especially on the eastern fringes of the plains, the Germans were also able to establish German-language newspapers, social organizations of various kinds, business ventures such as banks and insurance companies, plus restaurants, butcher shops, and taverns.

The census data can be somewhat misleading because the Germans were first of all a culture group rather than a people to be identified with a particular country. Thus, most Swiss, Alsatians, and Austrians who came to the Great Plains states were also Germans in language and culture, and almost all persons registered in the census of the Great Plains states as having been born in Russia were actually Germans whose families had migrated 50 to 100 years earlier to Russia, settling in Bessarabia, the area north of the Black Sea, and the Volga River region. There, at the invitation of Russian rulers, they lived in exclusively German communities. Having been granted significant cultural and political autonomy when they came, these Germans learned in 1871, to their great dismay, that their special privileges had been withdrawn. Faced with programs of Russification and conscription into the imperial army, substantial numbers of these Germans decided to emigrate. Beginning in 1873, the flow continued until World War I.¹⁴

The Russian Germans went to many lands, but the United States attracted most of them. Oriented to an agricultural way of life, they naturally sought out the cheap lands of the Great Plains. In contrast to the Germans from Germany, the Russian Germans retained a remarkable sense of cohesion and formed tightly knit communities, highly integrated on the basis of their religion and their origin in Russia. Most who came to Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma emigrated from the Volga region, while the Dakotas received those from the region north of the Black Sea. Similarly, Catholics among them settled in specific communities in North Dakota and Kansas, but are almost entirely absent from Nebraska. Mennonites founded large communities in Kansas, Oklahoma, and South Dakota, but they are less common in North Dakota, Colorado, and Nebraska. Meanwhile, Lutheran and Congregational com-

¹⁴ Hattie Plum Williams, *The Czar's Germans* (Lincoln: American Historical Society of Germans from Russia, 1975); Adam Giesinger, *From Catharine to Khrushchev: The Story of Russia's Germans* (Winnipeg, 1974); Adolph Schock, *In Quest of Free Land* (San Jose: San Jose State College, 1964); Gustav E. Reimer and G. R. Gaeddert, *Exiled by the Czar* (Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Publications Office, 1956).

munities of Russian Germans are numerous in Nebraska, Colorado, and the Dakotas.¹⁵

Russian Germans are most significant, both proportionately and in raw numbers, in North Dakota, where they dominate the central and south central part of the state. This area extends southward into South Dakota between the Missouri and the James rivers. Another South Dakota area of concentration lies in the southeastern part of the state on the fringe of the Great Plains. In Nebraska, Russian Germans are especially numerous in Lincoln and west along the Burlington Railroad. Another important district is centered in the North Platte Valley around Scottsbluff. A similar concentration is located in the South Platte Valley stretching west and southwest to Denver in Colorado. Kansas has two main enclaves—the Mennonite area north of Wichita and the Catholic communities of Ellis County near Hays. In Oklahoma, the Russian-Germans are found solidly within the Great Plains west and northwest of Oklahoma City.¹⁶

The Russian Germans are especially important in the development of the Great Plains area. They revolutionized wheat production in the southern plains through the introduction of Turkey Red wheat, a hard winter wheat especially suited to the Great Plains environment. Unusually thrifty, hardworking, and persistent, the Russian Germans succeeded agriculturally where others faltered. They provided a substantial reservoir of labor for the construction and maintenance of railroads in the West, and in the early twentieth century, their labor, organized chiefly on a family basis, made sugar beet culture a success in Nebraska and Colorado.¹⁷

¹⁵ Richard Sallet, trans. by LaVern J. Rippley and Armand Bauer, *Russian-German Settlements in the United States* (Fargo, North Dakota, [1931] 1974).

¹⁶ Hattie Plum Williams, *A Social Study of the Russian German* (Lincoln, 1916); Mary Eloise Johannes, *A Study of the Russian-German Settlements in Ellis County, Kansas* (Washington, 1946); Francis S. Laing, "German-Russian Settlements in Ellis County, Kansas," *Kansas State Historical Collections*, 11 (1909-10), 489-528; Alberta Pantle, "Settlement of the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren at Gnadenau, Marion County," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 13 (February 1945), 259-85; James R. Griess, *The German-Russians: Those Who Came to Sutton* (Hastings, Nebraska, 1968); Albert J. Petersen, Jr., "German-Russian Catholic Colonization in Western Kansas: A Settlement Geography" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1970); Norman E. Saul, "The Migration of the Russian-Germans to Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 40 (Spring 1974), 38-62.

¹⁷ Roger Welsch, "Germans from Russia: A Place to Call Home," in *Broken Hoops and Plains People* ([Lincoln] University of Nebraska Curriculum Development Center, 1976), 193-235.

Their descendants remain on the plains today and constitute a major element contributing to contemporary Great Plains conservatism.

Other German-speaking immigrants on the plains were the Swiss, Austrians, and Alsatians. These groups were rarely numerous enough to form strong colonies of their own. Consequently, the Swiss Germans usually merged with Germans from Germany, although identifiable colonies developed in Platte County, Nebraska, and near New Basel, Bern, and Gridley, in Kansas.¹⁸ Austrians are usually difficult to identify. While some were clearly German-speaking people from various parts of the Austrian Empire, others were actually Polish, Slovenian, or other non-German groups. Although Alsace became part of Germany in 1871, Alsatians often indicated France as the country of their birth. Finally, it should be noted that some of the persons classified as English-speaking Canadians in the census data were actually the children of German emigrants who lived in Canada for some years before moving on to the United States.

The second largest group of immigrants on the Great Plains is formed by a combination of English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and English Canadians. The most numerous group of English-speaking people were the Irish. Inveterate haters of the English, they continued to stream to America in the decades after the devastating famines of the mid-nineteenth century. Desperately poor and lacking education and craft skills, the Irish did not ordinarily possess the means to establish themselves on farms. Hence, they tended to congregate in the towns, where they worked as common laborers and as railroad workers. Nevertheless, Irish farm colonies were not unknown on the Great Plains. Perhaps the best known is O'Neill, Nebraska, and the several communities founded by the Irish Catholic Colonization Society during the 1870s in Greeley County, Nebraska.¹⁹ An undetermined number of persons listed as Irish-born in the census manuscripts were Scotch-Irish Protestants from northern Ireland.

The English were spread with remarkable evenness across the Great Plains states, although they clearly preferred the towns to the countryside. Not handicapped by their language, religion, or culture, they were able to

¹⁸ Carman, *Foreign-Language Units of Kansas*, 70.

¹⁹ There are almost no studies of Irish immigrants on the Great Plains. They must therefore be approached through colonization histories, e.g. Henthorne or Shannon, church histories, e.g. Casper (see above), or local histories, such as the centennial history of O'Neill, Nebraska: Burns E. McCulloh, *A Piece of Emerald* (O'Neill: Miles Publishing Co., 1974). The best treatment of Irish colonization in Nebraska is in Casper's third volume, *Catholic Chapters in Nebraska Immigration*, 3-97.

fit into American society with relative ease, even though many were poor farm laborers, with little education, who had been victimized by technological changes in Britain. Other English immigrants prospered as craftsmen, merchants, and professionals; hence, proportionately fewer pursued farming, compared to the Germans or Scandinavians.

A few English colonies were founded on the Great Plains. Runnymede in Kansas was intended by its founder in 1887 to be a place to convert the second sons of English gentry into sober, industrious farmers. But the young men were more interested in gambling, racing, hunting, drinking, and wenching than in farming, and they abandoned the place when their remittances from home were cut off. Victoria, Kansas, was only slightly more successful. Also intended for young British gentlemen, this venture was established by a Scotsman who introduced Aberdeen Angus cattle to the Great Plains.²⁰

The experiences of Scots on the Great Plains very closely duplicate those of the English. A few colonies developed here and there, but the Scots rarely congregated in identifiable groups. By contrast, the Welsh were somewhat more inclined to cluster together. Most numerous in Kansas, they settled in substantial numbers in Emporia. Most Welsh communities in Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota were organized around Presbyterian or Congregational churches, many of which offered services in the Welsh language. Limited by their small numbers, very few Welsh communities on the Great Plains survived to the end of the nineteenth century.²¹

²⁰ The causes and promotion of English emigration are treated by Oscar Winther in several articles: "English Migration to the American West," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 27 (February 1964), 159-73; "The English in Nebraska, 1857-1880," *Nebraska History*, 48 (Autumn 1967), 209-24; and "The English and Kansas, 1865-1890," in John Clark, ed., *The Frontier Challenge: Responses to the Trans-Mississippi West* (Lawrence, 1971), 235-73. In the same vein is Ronald A. Wells, "Migration and the Image of Nebraska in England," *Nebraska History*, 54 (Fall 1973), 475-91. See also William J. Chapman, "The Wakefield Colony," *Transactions of the Kansas State Historical Society*, 10 (1907-8), 485-533; Nyle H. Miller, ed., "An English Runnymede in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 41 (Spring and Summer 1975), 22-62 and 183-224; Blanche M. Taylor, "The English Colonies in Kansas, 1870-1895," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 41 (March 1972), 17-35.

²¹ Richard L. Guenther, "A History of the Welsh Community of Carroll, Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, 46 (September 1965), 209-24; Carolyn B. Berneking, "The Welsh Settlers of Emporia: A Cultural History," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 37 (Autumn 1971), 269-80.

Of the Scandinavian people in the Great Plains states, the Norwegians are the most numerous. At least half settled in North Dakota, where they are by far the largest single ethnic group. Most common in the eastern counties of the Red River Valley, they are also numerous in the north and west, surrounding the Russian Germans who occupy the south central part of the state. They were predominantly farmers and have adhered strongly to Lutheranism. More homogeneous than their cultural cousins, the Germans, they were, nevertheless, often divided by disputes between pietists and the orthodox within their churches. Their immigrant culture, however, conditioned them to favor cooperative economic and political ventures. Thus, their attitudes help to explain the curious mixture of conservatism and radical progressivism that has been characteristic of North Dakota politics in the twentieth century.

In South Dakota, the Norwegians have been outnumbered only by the more widely distributed Germans. Concentrated in the eastern counties of the state, they have not been numerous on the Great Plains proper. A few are found in the northeastern part of Nebraska, but they are almost entirely absent from the southern plains states.²²

The Swedes constitute the second largest Scandinavian group. Swedish settlers found Nebraska most to their liking. Already in the 1860s, they formed strong rural enclaves in the eastern part of the state, and by the 1880s, large colonies had been established on the plains, most notably in Polk and Phelps counties. Like the Norwegians, Swedes tended to cluster according to the province of their origin. Although they were more secular-minded than the Norwegians, the Swedes also tended to divide among the several churches, with the pietists favoring the Mission Covenant, Baptist, and Methodist churches, and the orthodox retaining their traditional adherence to the Lutheran church. In Kansas, the Swedes founded a very substantial colony in McPherson County on the eastern edge of the Great Plains, immediately northwest of the great Russian German Mennonite region. Buttressed by a full complement of ethnic institutions, including Bethany College of Lindsborg, the Swedes have been remarkably successful in politics, much like the Norwegians in North

²² Carlton Qualey, *Norwegian Settlement in the United States* (New York, [1938] 1970) surveys settlement patterns and introduces pre-1938 bibliography. Since then little has been published, but see Aagot Raaen, *Grass of the Earth: Immigrant Life in the Dakota Country* (Northfield, Minnesota, 1950); D. Jerome Tweton, "Three Scandinavian Immigrants in the American West," *Nebraska History*, 45 (September 1964), 253-64; and church histories, such as Eugene C. Nelson, *The Lutheran Church among Norwegian Americans* (Minneapolis, 1960).

Dakota. In the Dakotas the Swedes have constituted a substantial minority, though dominated by the more numerous Norwegians.²³

Like the Norwegians, the Danes have avoided the southern plains. They are most prominent in Nebraska, where at Blair on the Missouri River they established the only four-year Danish college in the United States. Their most substantial concentration on the Great Plains is located at Dannebrog in Howard County, Nebraska, and in rural Kearney County, Nebraska.²⁴

Of the many Slavic ethnic groups, only two, the Czechs and the Poles, settled in significant numbers on the Great Plains. Although isolated individuals of both groups arrived before the Civil War, most Czechs and Poles entered the country after the Great Plains region was settled. Hence, in the United States, the Slavic ethnic peoples are preeminently urban. Yet some of them were led, chiefly through church agencies, to the West. Of the two groups, the Czechs (Bohemians) were much more numerous.

More Czechs settled in Nebraska than in all other states of the Great Plains combined. The majority of the Nebraska Czechs settled in five counties (Douglas, Saunders, Butler, Colfax, and Saline), all of which are located east of the Great Plains proper. Yet they formed substantial minorities in several counties farther west, notably Boyd, Howard, and Valley. Despite Old World antagonisms, Czechs frequently tended to settle in places where Germans had gone first; they often understood the German language and their way of life was similar. On the plains most Czechs engaged in agriculture.

Although Czechs were traditionally members of the Catholic church, they were unusual in that a large percentage were outspokenly rationalist,

²³ Helge Nelson, *The Swedes and Swedish Settlements in North America* (Lund, Sweden, 1943) emphasizes geographic distribution. O. Fritiof Ander, *The Cultural Heritage of the Swedish Immigration* (Rock Island, Illinois, 1956) offers a good bibliography. Kansas Swedes have received much attention. See the works of Emory Lindquist, *Smoky Valley People: A History of Lindsborg, Kansas* (1953); *Vision for a Valley* (1970); "The Swedish Immigrant and Life in Kansas," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 29 (Spring 1963), 1-24, and "Swedes in Kansas before the Civil War," *ibid.*, 19 (August 1951), 254-68. Ruth Bilddt, *Pioneer Swedish-American Culture in Central Kansas* is useful, but see J. Iverne Dowie, *Prairie Grass Dividing* (Rock Island, Illinois, 1959) and "Unge Man, Ga Westerhut," *Nebraska History*, 54 (Spring 1973), 47-63.

²⁴ William E. Christensen, *Saga of the Tower: A History of Dana College and Trinity Seminary* (Blair, Nebraska, 1959); Alfred C. Nielsen, *Life in an American Denmark* (Des Moines, 1962); Kenneth E. Miller, "Danish Socialism and the Kansas Prairie," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 38 (Summer 1972), 156-68.

freethinking, or agnostic. This anticlerical element revered the memory of the great pre-Reformation figure John Hus as the father of Czech nationalism. Such sentiments were transferred to America, where a system of fraternal lodges was developed that served many of the functions normally provided by the church, especially in rural settings. Czechs from Moravia were commonly more firmly attached to the Catholic church than those from Bohemia.²⁵

The Poles were the only other Slavic people to settle in significant numbers on the Great Plains. Except for their much smaller numbers, Polish distribution and occupations were similar to those of the Czechs. While most Polish immigrants settled in the industrial cities of the East and Midwest, a few engaged in farming as far west as the Great Plains. As with the Czechs, the Nebraska Poles outnumbered those of all other Great Plains states combined, not including Texas. The majority were brought to Nebraska by a church-related colonization program during the 1880s that sought to remove Polish immigrants from the coal fields of Pennsylvania and other eastern centers of industrial activity to a rural society where, it was believed, they could more easily succeed in a material way and at the same time retain their ethnic language and customs. Except for the sizable colony in Omaha, most Nebraska Poles settled on farms in Platte County and on the eastern limits of the Sandhills in Howard and Sherman counties. Strongly Catholic in their religion, they settled close to Czechs, Germans, and Irish immigrants of the same faith. The Platte County Poles, who named their community Tarnov, were from Austrian Poland, while those in Howard and Sherman counties emigrated from German Poland.²⁶

The Jews were one of the most distinctive, though numerically less significant, ethnoreligious groups to enter the Great Plains region, coming first from Germany and later from Russia. Two very different kinds of settlement occurred. The first consisted of isolated individuals, usually of

²⁵ F. J. Swehla, "Bohemians in Central Kansas," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 13 (1913-14), 469-512; Rose Rosický, *A History of the Czechs (Bohemians) in Nebraska* (Omaha, 1929); Robert I. Kutak, *The Story of a Bohemian-American Village* (New York, [1933] 1970) treats Milligan, Nebraska; Russell W. Lynch, "Czech Farmers in Oklahoma," *Department of Geography Bulletin*, 39 (Stillwater: Oklahoma A and M, 1942); Vladimir Kucera and Alfred Novacek, eds., *Czechs and Nebraska* (Ord, Nebraska, 1967); Joseph G. Svoboda, "Czechs: The Love of Liberty," in *Broken Hoops and Plains People*, 153-90.

²⁶ Poles are treated extensively in Casper, *Catholic Chapters in Nebraska Immigration*, 143-89; Meroe J. Owens, "John Barzynski, Land Agent," *Nebraska History*, 36 (June 1955), 81-91.

German origin, who served isolated rural settlers as itinerant merchants. Gradually, those who were successful in such ventures chose a town in which to reside permanently; there they often operated clothing stores and were rapidly assimilated into small-town society. If they retained strong Jewish religious values, they were likely to migrate later, when their children began to mature, to larger cities where they expected to find a community of persons who shared their beliefs.

The second type of Jewish settlement on the Great Plains occurred chiefly in the 1880s and 1890s when established German Jewish organizations sought to locate incoming Russian Jews, often impoverished and illiterate, in agricultural colonies in various parts of the country. Because much land was still available for purchase or homesteading on the Great Plains, the region inevitably attracted a dozen or so of these communal agricultural settlements, none of which lasted for more than a few years. The best known of these communities was Beersheba, located thirty-five miles northwest of Dodge City, Kansas. Sponsored by the Hebrew Union Agricultural Society of Cincinnati, this colony consisted of about twenty families. Although its failure may be attributed to drought, poor land, ignorance of farming methods, and inadequate financial support, most startling was the refusal of its sponsors to plan appropriately or to adjust to environmental conditions as they actually existed on the plains.²⁷

Other similar colonies were established elsewhere in western Kansas and in the Dakotas. After several years the colonists in every instance drifted to larger cities. Omaha, for example, received several families that deserted the Painted Woods colony near Devils Lake, North Dakota. As late as 1908 another Jewish colony was founded, this one in the midst of the Sandhills in Cherry County, Nebraska, where fourteen young families homesteaded land under the terms of the Kinkaid Act of 1904, which permitted farms up to 640 acres instead of the inadequate 160 acres of the original Homestead Act. Most of these families engaged in stock raising and remained long enough (five years) to acquire title to the land. By 1915 all had departed.²⁸

²⁷ For general historiographical purposes see Robert E. Levinson, "American Jews in the West," *Western Historical Quarterly*, V (July 1974), 285-94. See also Leo Shpall, "Jewish Agricultural Colonies in the United States," *Agricultural History*, 24 (July 1950), 120-46, and Elbert L. Sapinsley, "Jewish Agricultural Colonies in the West: The Kansas Example," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 3 (April 1971); A. James Rudin, "Beersheba, Kansas: 'God's Pure Air on Government Land'," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 24 (Autumn 1968), 282-98.

²⁸ Ella Fleischman Auerbach, "A Record of the Jewish Settlement in Nebraska" (typescript, Nebraska State Historical Society, 1927); Carol Gendler, "The Jews of

Rural and small-town concentrations of French Canadians grew in several areas. The largest number settled in North Dakota south of the Canadian border. A cluster of more than a hundred persons also developed around Campbell, Nebraska. Most had come west after living a short time near Kankakee, Illinois. A similar, larger enclave of Canadians developed seventy-five miles southeast in Concordia, Kansas. All were firmly attached to the Catholic church.

Two basic elements may be distinguished among the Chicanos of the Great Plains. One major element of the population of New Mexico consists of persons sometimes called Hispanos—members of an ethnic group that has resulted from the intermarriage of Indians and Spanish since 1600. From Santa Fe, the center of the Hispano area, these people spread eastward and northward onto the Great Plains in the nineteenth century. By 1870 they occupied much of the upper reaches of both the Pecos and Canadian rivers and the area east of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains north to tributaries of the Arkansas. Today they constitute as much as 40 percent of the population of the counties in these parts of New Mexico and Colorado. Thus, Hispanos must be considered as among the original and numerically dominant people in this part of the southern Great Plains. When members of this group migrated to work in the fields of Kansas and Nebraska, they were in a relationship akin to that of the blacks who moved to the plains from another part of the country. On the other hand, most of the so-called Chicanos on the Great Plains have been Mexicans rather than New Mexicans. They must be classified as foreign-born persons; their status technically resembles that of Canadian immigrants.

Movement of settlers from Mexico onto the central and northern Great Plains areas is a phenomenon only of the past fifty years. Many persons were propelled northward by the suffering and confusion of the Mexican Revolution after 1910. After World War I, Chicanos or Mexican-Americans gradually replaced Russian Germans in the sugar beet fields as migrant workers. They have also worked extensively in meat packing and in railroad construction and maintenance. Inevitably, a few have remained as permanent residents of such communities as Scottsbluff and Grand Island, Nebraska, and Dodge City, Garden City, and

Omaha—"The First Sixty Years," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 5 (April and July 1973) and 6 (January, April, and July 1974); Lois Fields Schwartz, "Early Jewish Agricultural Colonies in North Dakota," *North Dakota History*, 32 (October 1965), 217-32.

Wichita, Kansas. Generally, the Mexican-Americans have been highly retentive of their language and culture, a trait intensified by decades of discrimination, poverty, and inadequate education.²⁹

Although blacks have been found on the Great Plains from the earliest penetration of the region, they never constituted a numerically large element of the population in the nineteenth century. Before the Civil War, blacks were to be found among the Cherokee and Creek Indians of Oklahoma, and some were slaves. About seventy-five were counted in Nebraska Territory in 1860, of whom a half dozen were slaves of army officers stationed at Fort Kearny; the remainder lived along the Missouri River, east of the Great Plains. During the postwar period, blacks could often be found as drovers or cooks in the outfits that brought Texas cattle to Kansas and Nebraska railroads. It is commonly estimated that blacks accounted for about five thousand of the thirty-five thousand men engaged in driving cattle from Texas. While most of these men returned to the South, a few remained as ranch hands on the central and northern Great Plains. They suffered less discrimination in this occupation than in most that were available to blacks at that time, and while they could rise to the prestigious post of cook, they could never become foremen or trail bosses. Similarly, blacks were to be found as cooks and deckhands on the steamboats of the Upper Missouri River and later as porters on passenger trains crossing the plains. Generally, they were burdened with the most menial of tasks and were regularly denied any position of authority over white men. Black women also occasionally found employment in frontier plains communities as servants and laundresses. The circumstances of employment in each instance militated against family life and permanent residence. Blacks were usually exploited by the society rather than allowed to be an integral part of society, even on a segregated basis.³⁰

²⁹ An extensive bibliography on Spanish-speaking groups in the United States has developed during the past decade. Like the classic accounts by Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-speaking People of the United States* (New York, [1949] 1968) and Manuel Gamio, *Mexican Immigration to the United States* (New York, [1930] 1971), recent studies treat the Great Plains region only incidentally. A useful guide to recent research is Juan Gómez-Quirón and Luis Leobardo Arroyo, "On the State of Chicano History," *Western Historical Quarterly*, VII (April 1976), 155-85. It includes references to other historiographical and bibliographical materials. Ralph Grajeda, "Chicanos: The Mestizo Heritage," in *Broken Hoops and Plains People*, 47-98, surveys the Chicano presence in Nebraska.

³⁰ A full treatment is to be found in W. Sherman Savage, *Blacks in the West* (Westport, Connecticut, 1976), but see also Kenneth Porter, *The Negro on the American Frontier* (New York, 1970) and Philip Durham and Everett L. Jones, *The Negro*

So it was also with the famed "Buffalo soldiers" of the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry and the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-fifth Infantry divisions, which, throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century, were stationed at dreary, distant, isolated posts on the Great Plains and in the mountain and desert country of the Southwest. Bringing law and order to the frontier, they pursued Indians who left their reservations and guarded railroad construction crews, survey parties, and stagecoaches. Often not well treated by the army itself, these black soldiers frequently suffered from the hostility of the very people they protected. Indeed, they were stationed on the Great Plains frontier precisely because it was sparsely populated and hence instances of racial conflict could be kept at a minimum.³¹

The first substantial effort to provide blacks with a permanent place on the plains came in 1879, when many thousands of former slaves journeyed from the South to a new "promised land" in Kansas. Perhaps as many as 40,000 Exodusters, as they were called, made their way up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers or trekked across Oklahoma, but a much smaller number made it to the high plains of western Kansas. The most famous colony of black homesteaders was established at Nicodemus in Graham County, which reached a peak population of 595 in 1910. Most blacks found employment in the cities and towns of Kansas, while others, broken and discouraged, returned to the South. By 1900, the black population of Kansas exceeded 50,000. Farther north in Nebraska, where a few black homesteaders also survived, there were only 6,000 blacks, mostly concentrated in Omaha. In the Dakotas, blacks constituted less than one-tenth of one percent of the population at the end of the nineteenth century. Oklahoma Territory attracted large numbers of blacks fleeing oppression in southern states after it was opened to settlement about 1890. They found the same caste relationships there as existed in the South, however, and began to isolate themselves in all-black communities. Between 1890 and 1910, approximately twenty-five black communities, such as Langston and Boley, were formed, as Oklahoma's black population

Cowboys (New York, 1965). William L. Katz, *The Black West* (rev. ed., Garden City, New York, 1973) offers excellent pictures.

³¹ William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman, 1967); Arlen Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869-1891* (Westport, Connecticut, 1971). Jack Foner, *Blacks in the Military in American History* (New York, 1974) places the buffalo soldier in a larger perspective.

increased to 137,000 persons. Most were located in the eastern half of the state.³²

In some communities of the Great Plains, the highest black population was attained in 1890, a year that came at the end of a prosperity cycle. For wealthy families in prosperous cities on the plains, such as Hastings, Grand Island, or North Platte, the employment of Negro house servants had become a mode of ostentatious display. The subsequent depression of the 1890s rendered such status symbols too expensive, and large numbers of the blacks thereupon left for points east.

In order to succeed in American society it was necessary for the immigrants to conform to certain basic standards of behavior. Old World standards of conduct sometimes served poorly in the new environment. It was particularly distressing for the newcomer to find that his dress, speech, and mannerisms were often derided or ridiculed. He had to accommodate his behavior to dominant patterns and he had to learn enough English to get along. Many newcomers speedily learned to participate freely and fully on many levels of American life.³³

Accommodation of American norms depended on a wide range of variables. The most important factor was personal adaptation. The speed with which a person adjusted reflected individual attitudes and psychological needs. For one person, the consolations of orthodox religion were paramount; for another, economic security could be primary. For one immigrant, living in the midst of an ethnic enclave could be a psychological necessity; for another, it could be a hindrance to economic success. In general the rate of assimilation, of being absorbed into American society, was related directly to the number and quality of interpersonal contacts the immigrant had with persons of the host culture. Thus, if a person lived in the midst of an isolated farming community of Czechs, for example, days and sometimes weeks could pass in which the immigrant would

³² Nell Painter, *The Exodusters* (New York, 1976) treats chiefly the causes of the emigration. See also Glen Schwendemann, "Nicodemus: Negro Haven on the Solomon," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 24 (Spring 1968), 10-31, and Mozell C. Hill, "The All-Negro Communities of Oklahoma," *Journal of Negro History*, 21 (July 1946). For an example of a black pioneer who experienced notable success on the Great Plains, see Robert Anderson, *From Slavery to Affluence: Memoirs of Robert Anderson, Ex-Slave* (Hemingford, Nebraska, 1927).

³³ I have discussed the problem of assimilation more extensively in *Immigrants and Politics*, 33-52. See also my "German Immigrants and the Churches in Nebraska," *Mid-America*, 50 (April 1968), 116-30.

have no communication with persons outside his family or ethnic group. Often the larger the ethnic community was, the slower was the rate of assimilation of its members. The effectiveness of ethnic institutions was also important. The church may have been the only ethnic institution in a given immigrant settlement, but it could so dominate an immigrant's life that he had few meaningful contacts with members of the host society. For example, assimilation was usually very slow in Mennonite and especially in Hutterite colonies in Kansas, South Dakota, and Montana. Furthermore, residents of polyglot communities tended to assimilate more quickly than those who lived in distinctively ethnic communities. Lack of uniformity in language and customs hastened the adoption of dominant American patterns. Other variables include education and economic success. Prosperity, often accompanied by a good education, usually meant rapid assimilation. Rate of immigration into an area was also important. If a large number of immigrants entered a community within a short period of time, the likelihood of exciting nativist fears was increased. Finally, the more mobile an immigrant was, the more rapid was his accommodation to American standards.

If the above generalizations are correct, it is apparent that, in order to understand the importance of ethnic settlers on the Great Plains, the mobility and persistence of ethnic groups and their marriage and family patterns must be studied in comparison to members of the dominant, native-born society. Yet very few studies of this kind exist. Since the Great Plains has always been an area of very low population, the numbers of any immigrant group in a given locality on the plains have necessarily been small by comparison to ethnic enclaves in urban and rural places in the East. Moreover, their numbers have ordinarily been too small to create or sustain many ethnic institutions. Hence, one might assume that assimilation was comparatively rapid on the Great Plains, despite the isolation that was common to many immigrants. Ordinarily more numerous in the countryside than in the towns, individual ethnic groups rarely were in a position to dominate Great Plains cities. Swedish dominance of Lindsborg, Kansas, for example, was an exception not often matched on the plains.

It is clear also that ethnic groups have been less mobile than dominant elements of the population. While we know that there was an outmigration from rural ethnic enclaves on the Great Plains, it is apparent that other members of the same ethnic group took the places of those who left. If Norwegians were the first to settle in a certain locality, their descendants

may be found there today. The same is true of Swedes, Danes, Germans, Czechs, and Poles. Persistence was less common, however, among the English-speaking immigrant groups, the Jews, and the blacks. This suggests that persistence, as a dimension of assimilation, is related to the degree of difference that exists between the immigrants' culture and that of the receiving society.

The behavior patterns and value systems brought to America by the English, Scottish, and Welsh differed only slightly from what had become characteristic of Americans by the time the Great Plains area was settled. Even their Protestantism corresponded closely to the pietism typical of American religion. So easily were they able to slip into the American social structure that the development of ethnic subsocieties was largely superfluous. Hence, their mobility patterns seem to have been much like those of old-stock Americans. The maintenance of ethnic institutions among them was more an exercise in sentimentality than in social necessity.

The Irish were often significantly different from other English-speaking immigrants. They had the great advantage of speaking English, but in other respects, especially in their adherence to Catholicism, they were distinctive. Ethnic awareness among the Irish was also the product of their centuries-long struggle against English dominance in their homeland. Like the English, they rarely formed colonies on the plains but instead filtered into the area as individuals or as families. Much more conscious of their ethnicity than the English, they remain a cultural force in communities such as O'Neill and Greeley, Nebraska, where they were dominant during the frontier period.

Of the non-English-speaking ethnic groups, the Scandinavians usually assimilated the most rapidly. Even though they often prized their ethnic culture, they learned English rapidly and adapted quickly to the standards of social and political behavior established by the so-called WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants). Although their Lutheranism was imported, its moralism resembled American pietism. The Scandinavians were perceived as especially desirable immigrants. They quickly gained entrée to economic and political structures and were admitted to more exclusive social groups as the second generation intermarried with members of the established society. Norwegians, in contrast to their Swedish and Danish cousins, were somewhat more retentive of their ethnic culture and often resisted language transition, even as they retained adherence to their Lutheran churches. While the Scandinavians ordinarily assimilated rap-

idly, they have remained remarkably persistent in those parts of the Great Plains where their fathers first settled in the nineteenth century.

The Germans were usually unable to sustain ethnic institutions other than their Lutheran, Catholic, Mennonite, and Evangelical churches because of their widespread distribution throughout most parts of the Great Plains. An exception to this could be found in cities where they were unusually numerous, such as Grand Island or Hastings, Nebraska. German Lutherans, who were orthodox and ritualistic rather than pietistic, systematically used ethnic culture as a means to bolster religious commitment. One-room Lutheran parochial schools, with the pastor as teacher, were not uncommon in German settlements on the plains by the 1890s. By contrast, purely German Catholic parishes were rare, except among the Russian Germans. German Mennonites consciously developed isolated communities as a means of retaining religious purity and thus they were the slowest of the German groups to assimilate.

While the Germans were often cultural chauvinists, believing that their culture was superior to all others, the Germans from Russia were more conscious of themselves as an ethnic group that differed noticeably from the rest of the population. Cut off from the sources of German culture during their long residence in Russia, they were accustomed to stubbornly retaining their ethnic ways in an alien environment. Their women continued to wear their long black dresses and their shawls, the men, their old-world caps and coats. They were derided as "Rooshans" by the "Americans," but they gathered strength from each other, knowing that full social acceptance by established society was distant, if not unattainable, within their lifetimes. Inevitably, Russian German determination, persistence, and single-minded stubbornness became legendary. It is not surprising, therefore, that today the Germans from Russia are the only German group on the Great Plains who actively and consciously cultivate their ethnic heritage.

The Czechs and Poles were much like the Germans from Russia in this respect. Significantly different from the host society in language, religion, folkways, and culture, they have retained a sense of ethnic identity that immigrant groups such as Germans and Scandinavians have lost. Like the Irish in their historic struggle against the English, the Czechs resisted Austrian and German political and cultural imperialism for five hundred years. Inevitably, this heritage has intensified their sense of ethnic nationalism. The Czechs managed to retain a high level of cohesion while par-

ticipating in significant ways in the economic and political life of the larger society.

Of all the European ethnic groups that attempted to establish enclaves on the Great Plains, the Jews differed the most from the dominant Anglo-American Protestant culture. Hobbled by poverty and ignorance of farming methods, speaking a strange tongue, significantly different in custom and manner, non-Christian in religion, their ethnoreligious consciousness intensified by centuries of Christian persecution, the Russian Jewish colonists could have succeeded only if their numbers had been greatly augmented. Had they settled in groups large enough to establish and maintain the strong ethnic institutions their differentness required for survival, they would have evoked a hostility comparable perhaps to that suffered by the Mormons in Nauvoo, Illinois. At the same time, it is unlikely that the physical environment of the Great Plains would have permitted the requisite concentration of population necessary for ethnic survival.

Similarly, the blacks on the plains, except those in Oklahoma, could not achieve the "critical mass" necessary for the survival of their agricultural communities. Most blacks who remained on the plains found homes in urban places where small enclaves could be formed. Isolated individuals or families could be found here or there, and some were remarkably well integrated into white society. But they were exceptions to the usual pattern.

From the point of view of the host society, most European ethnic groups were eagerly welcomed to help populate the Great Plains states. Old-stock Americans who held positions of leadership were in most instances kind, helpful, and generous to the newcomers. Ethnic conflict and conscious acts of discrimination were rare on the plains, in contrast to the ethnic conflicts often afflicting industrial and mining communities in the East and parts of the mountainous West. Because cultural differences were ordinarily not great, tolerance was easy; the assimilation process was allowed to proceed at its own pace. Instances of ethnic-based friction and sometimes open conflict were usually glossed over or ignored. Yet there was no question that dominant elements in the society expected the immigrants ultimately to conform fully to Anglo-American standards of behavior and attitude.

Despite the general goodwill that prevailed, the typical old-stock American had scant appreciation of the problems experienced by the im-

migrants—the psychological toll exacted by moving from one cultural milieu to another, the sensitivity of the newcomer to ridicule, the internal conflicts that often divided ethnic communities, or the generational differences that frequently lacerated family relationships. Nor could the typical old-stock American understand how and why ethnic differences accounted for variations in political behavior.

Sharp differences existed in the voting patterns of ethnic groups on the plains. The English, Scots, and Welsh tended to vote Republican, as did Scandinavian groups. The Irish, Czechs, and Poles were just as likely to vote Democratic. The heterogeneous Germans were harder to classify. While German Catholics could be expected to return solid Democratic majorities, German Protestants were likely to prefer Republican candidates, unless they were German Lutherans, as many were. The attitudes of all groups were rooted in ethnic culture and religion, and startling variations distinguished the several groups and subgroups. Issues that touched immigrant interests usually related to ethnic culture, such as prohibition, woman suffrage, Sabbatarian legislation, and regulation of parochial schools. Ethnic defenders of the Democratic party perceived their organization as the champion of the largest measure of personal liberty consistent with law and order. The Republican party, described by its defenders as the political vehicle of progress and reform, was understood by its ethnic enemies as an agency of cultural imperialism designed to impose Anglo-American patterns upon unwilling immigrant peoples. Inevitably, ethnic groups whose cultural values and attitudes resembled those of the dominant Anglo-Americans preferred the Republican party, as did individual immigrants who were psychologically attuned to a rapid assimilation; other groups, more pluralistic in their attitudes, recognized parallels between their values and the ideals traditionally expressed by the Democrats.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Great Plains had been largely settled. Uninhabited pockets remained in western parts of the Dakotas and in eastern areas in Montana and Wyoming. These were rapidly filled before World War I, and many of the settlers, as earlier, were European immigrants. Foreign languages continued to be used in almost all of the ethnic enclaves on the plains from Columbus, Nebraska, to Fort Collins, Colorado, and from Prague, Oklahoma, to Strassburg, North Dakota. Foreign-language newspapers and periodicals, especially church-related publications produced in eastern cities, continued to be read by

large numbers of Germans, Swedes, Norwegians, and Czechs. Ethnic churches and sometimes schools flourished, and even a few ethnic colleges had been founded. Here and there, banks, insurance companies, restaurants, and shops catered to ethnic clienteles. Ethnic politics, though never really approved of by the old-stock Americans, was taken for granted in most quarters. In all parts of the Great Plains there were monuments ranging from transcontinental railroads to fields of winter wheat that testified to the industry, perseverance, and ingenuity of settlers from many lands.